3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

one of those which is frequently symbolized in the chisungu by the offering of food in order of age; by acts of obeisance to seniors; by the singing over and over again of the song about the immutability of precedence based on age, which runs 'The arm-pit cannot be higher than the shoulder'. The girl's proper conduct is expressed in the phrase 'be submissive, or make yourself soft and pliant before your elders' (*ukunakila kubakalamba*).

There is in fact a greater expression of the principle of precedence by age in the chisungu than in the chiefly rites themselves. This may be due to the fact that all rites of role assumption naturally give importance to age since it is those who have already assumed the senior role who can hand it on to the juniors. It is also true that Bemba girls are not removed from their own family to be put under the control of their mothers-in-law as in a patrilineal society, but they are placed under the authority of different older women in their own and other villages. Some of these are related to the girls and some are not. It must be remembered too that the chisungu is a public ceremony given over to teaching while most of the chiefly rites are done in secret and people merely assume that they have been correctly carried out.

Turning now to the social groups based on descent, it is worth noting that there is very little ritual expression of clan or lineage unity in the chisungu in spite of the fact that it deals with marriage and procreation. The principle of matrilineal descent is very strongly held here in spite of the domestic authority the father manages to win, which is greater than that reported from other matrilineal peoples in the area such as the Yao. The dogma as to the nature of biological descent was never questioned during my visit or the belief that the woman was responsible for the production of the child.[1] Exogamy rules within the clan are carefully kept, and clan greetings used. Yet although in some Bantu societies clan and lineage precedence is expressed in first-fruit ceremonies and members of different clans sit apart in clearly marked groups at tribal rites, in Lubemba there is no ritual ex-

[1] I quote in my article on the Bemba in *African Political Systems* edited by E. E. Evans-Pritchard and M. Fortes, 1939, (p. 97) an amazed comment made by a patrilineal Ngoni about Bemba beliefs on the subject: 'If I have a bag and put money in it, the money belongs to me. But the Bemba say a man puts semen into a woman and yet the children belong to the woman, not to the man.'

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

pression of this principle of social grouping beyond the precedence given at the court to the descendants of certain clans who accompanied the first Citimukulu to the present territory, and some ritual duties based on clan membership. In the chisungu however, it is the family which is emphasized and not the lineage. It must be recalled that the Bemba boy provides his own small token payments at marriage and does service for his father-in-law. His maternal relatives do not often help him and they are not economically interested in the success of the marriage as are bride's relatives among the patrilineal Southern Bantu. The boy himself is making an individual contract with all his wife's relatives. The girl's father and mother and the father's sister are the main actors in the ceremony and the father is the potential head of the extended family which will be based on uxorilocal residence.

Further, the clan and lineage have no political functions as corporate groups except in the case of the royal dynasty. It might therefore be concluded that ceremonies for expressing corporate feeling are not necessary. It might be equally well concluded that the ceremonies connected with chiefs' succession do in fact portray the principles of matrilineal descent and that the chisungu emphasizes the girl's duty to bear children for her maternal relatives. These suggestions should be tested in other matrilineal societies.

It seems clear that the maintenance of a stable family group is a difficult matter among the Bemba. There is the desire of the girl to stay with her own people which is opposed to that of the boy who wishes to return to his, and there are no economic links to bind them to one village rather than another. This type of contract may account for the chisungu ritual which stresses the link between husband and wife; the supernatural sanctions against adultery; and the constant admonishment of the girl to submit to her husband, to give him honour and also to give honour and food to her in-laws. The series of presentations of food to the son-in-law might also be listed as part of the whole process of winning the young bridegroom and persuading him to stay in his wife's village.

To conclude, Bemba chieftainship rites express a number of beliefs that are common to the chisungu such as the sex-fire-blood association and the link between political authority and the ac-

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

firmly convinced that the conduct of each partner to a marriage has a magical effect on the health of the other, and even on that of a third party who commits adultery with one or the other.

If a man dies, his spirit is thought to linger round the body of his widow, and to be a potential danger to anyone subsequently marrying her. The same is true of a widower on the death of his wife. It seems clear that the clan of the man or woman is involved, since, unless the wife is inherited, a substitute from the dead partner's clan is required to sleep with the surviving partner in order to fetch his or her spirit back to the clan.

One could interpret this requirement by saying that the spirit of a dead Bemba is thought to haunt the living if the departed man or woman has been defrauded of his or her rights. If this interpretation is correct, it can be assumed that a man who sleeps with the widow before the necessary ceremony of 'taking off the death' has taken place is regarded as defrauding the dead man of the marital rights he had acquired. The clan brother who sleeps with the widow to take off the death which lingers on or around her presumably acts as the social equivalent of the dead man and not on behalf of the clan as a whole; the matrilineal clan or lineage does not normally act as a corporate group with regard to the marriage of one of its male members, although the woman's lineage, in the person of her mother's brother, does assume such a position of control.

Should it be objected that the initial rights of husbands over wives in Bemba society are much less substantial than those of husbands in the patrilineal bride-wealth tribes, this must be admitted; yet in Bemba society, perhaps just because of the lack of durable property in which status can be expressed, there is a tremendous insistence upon points of precedence and honour, and fights over what seem to us to be trivial claims and dues. So the apparent contradiction between the strength of the mystic links between spouses and the weakness of the economic ties between them is not so surprising a paradox in terms of Bemba culture as it would be in our own. Moreover however uncertain a husband's rights as father may be, his sexual rights over his wife are never questioned. It is these which are at issue in the ceremony of 'taking off the death'. These interpretations, however, are guesswork;